

Transcript of interview
IN CONVERSATION: SIR ALEX FERGUSON CBE

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Sir Alex, may we welcome you to Christie's. Where did a busy football manager travelling all round the world get a chance to first become interested in wine?

It started in 1991 actually. I went to Montpellier, to assess the hotels for us staying in the quarter final European Cup Winners' Cup, and I stayed in this small hotel, the 'Maison Blanche', and the owner, we got talking away and he says, 'would you like lunch?' And I says, 'yeah okay, let's.' So we go to this restaurant, there's a showcase window, and they've got a bottle of Pétrus and a bottle of Château d'Yquem. He says to me, 'Are you interested in wine?' I say 'Well, I like a glass of red wine, yes. I don't really know much about it.' He says, 'Invest in '82's and '85's. You won't go wrong.' I was at a lunch not so long after, maybe about '93, and I was speaking to a chap there from Willoughby's Wines in Manchester, and I was telling him the story, and he said, 'Yeah, '85's, '82's, definitely.' So I invested then, and that really kicked me on to where we are today.

So your collecting started with Bordeaux. Clearly you then moved in to Burgundy and to some Italian wines. Does that reflect what you like to drink at home?

Yeah, well we've plenty in the house, quite a lot of Ornellaia and a lot of Tignanello. Tignanello's one of the real underrated Italian wines. I've got Sassicaia, I've got the Pétrus and I've got Haut-Brions and Cheval Blancs. I've enough there for hopefully to last me quite a few years.

Wine is all about vintages, it's all about years, and particularly in your collection you have Burgundy in strength and depth from great producer, Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, particularly the '99 vintage. Now obviously in your life in 1999, important things were happening

It was the greatest time of my life. People keep saying, 'What was the best moment of your life as a manager?' and '99 is without question. There was always this thing about my career that I never had won the Champion's League, so to win it in the way we did win it was absolutely fantastically special. And it coincided with a vintage; you were talking about Romanée-Conti, '99, a really special year. I think we deserved that!

We've read that you have had experiences with, er, other managers and, in your football life, of sharing wine.

Yeah.

Is that something that is more recent? Was it something you started, or something that was already...

I think I probably started that. We're all in the same industry, we've all shared the same kind of problems, and I always encourage the visiting manager to come in for a glass of wine and a bite to eat with me and my staff. Even though the rivalries are intense, you have to find that moment where you can say 'look, the game's a game - let's carry on with our lives.' My 25th year at United, Sam Allardyce bought me a 1986 Latour, the year I came to United. His kit manager gave it to me in the morning, the Saturday morning, and I say, 'I'm going to play a trick here', so I opened it up and put a bottle of Ribena

in. So Sam comes in after the game and I says, 'Thanks very much for the wine, Sam, it's really very generous of you'. He said, 'Well, you go home and enjoy that'. I said, 'No, I want to share it with you'. He said, 'Well, thanks very much, okay', so open it up and I go, 'What's this, Sam?' He, he bolts out that door, honestly, like a wild man, screaming for his kit manager, and when he come back in I had the bottle opened, and I was pouring the glasses, but it was a fantastic moment, I had to get him. Mancini always brought a bottle of Sassicaia to the game. He knew his wines okay. Arsène has some decent wines. Chelsea weren't very good. I had to give them, remind them that they should have better wine! Abramovich in fact sent me a case of Tignanello, er, the next week after I say that. And Jose promised to bring a Barca Velha, but didn't, and I gave him so much stick. Next time he came, he had Barca Velha.

The sale that we'll be doing in Hong Kong and London, and online later this year, we've got something in the order of about 5,000 of your bottles.

The Asia thing is going to be interesting because when we go to the Far East, we understand this great romance between the Asian people and Manchester United. And there's an expectation because of that. Round about the time I started buying, my wife says, 'You're going to kill yourself. You're obsessed with the game.' Taking an interest in wine allowed me to have an interest outside the game. You have to have outside interest to distract you away from the intensity and the pressure you come under as a football manager. And all of a sudden, 2 or 3 years ago, when I'm going through the portfolio, we realise this has got to be an amazing amount of wine. I retired last year, and I thought this was a good time to, to sell it.

Finally, maybe we could ask you the ultimate dream question; Scotland are in the World Cup Final and you're there. What wine do you drink?

Well I think it would either be a Romanée-Conti or a Pétrus, absolutely without doubt. We keep dreaming. Scots have got a great desire for their country to do well. You see the supporters when they go abroad, they're a fantastic bunch. But that would be a, that would be a dream come true. And hopefully Manchester United will win the European Cup again.

Well, Sir Alex, thank you for your time.

Pleasure, David.

And we look forward to a great success with your sales in May and June.

Thank you.

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